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Municipalities share costs – WHY NOT DECISIONS?

In an ideal world, I would begin this issue's message with the words "We finally have some good news regarding the Building Canada Fund (BCF)." Unfortunately, although I have spent the better part of my first few months as AMM President meeting with various officials about this very issue, it is clearly not an ideal world as I have no more information now than when I began.

The issue really came to the forefront back on January 13 when the Province of Manitoba and the Government of Canada announced the Communities Component of the Building Canada infrastructure plan was now "open for business" in Manitoba. The announcement invited communities with a population of less than 100,000 to apply for funding for their important public infrastructure projects, getting work underway as soon as this year's construction season begins.

This announcement was certainly a long time coming and one the AMM had waited patiently for since the BCF program was announced back in 2007. However, the extremely tight deadline of February 23 left AMM members little time to prepare and submit their applications. While it is true that many projects are left over from the last intake of the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (MRIF), not all projects fall into this category. The deadline virtually excluded a number of communities that have a new project or whose project has changed significantly.

Even more distressing is the lack of a municipal voice in the selection process. In meetings with various officials both provincially and federally, including Minister of Manitoba Infrastructure & Transportation **Ron Lemieux**, Portage-Lisgar MP **Candice Hoepfner**, and Federal Regional Minister for Manitoba **Vic Toews**, we were told very clearly that the AMM would not be included in the selection process this round due to the need to get projects allocated quickly. While Minister Toews noted our involvement in future rounds will be reviewed, it is

of grave concern that municipalities – who are one-third funding partners – are currently shut out of this entire process.

Having recently returned from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) board meeting in Victoria, BC, I can tell you that, in speaking to my colleagues from across Canada, there are still many details missing from the Communities Component of the Building Canada Fund. The FCM and AMM will continue to push for predictability, flexibility, and efficiency within Building Canada – the same criteria essential to all successful municipal infrastructure funding programs.

While the rollout of the BCF is one of the larger issues we are currently facing, it is certainly not the only issue. Most recently, we heard a presentation from Manitoba Conservation around proposed amendments to the *Onsite Wastewater Management Systems (OWMS) Regulation under the Environment Act*. The AMM is very concerned with the impact the proposed amendments will have on municipal infrastructure and has urged Minister of Conservation **Stan Struthers** to consult further with municipalities on this issue. We have also arranged to have Manitoba Conservation present this information at a plenary session at MOS in April, and be available afterward to answer your questions. Please attend this important session, and make your views known.

Our year is well under way and our work certainly appears to be cut out for us! I am thankful for the many opportunities I have already had to meet with our members, including our recent round of Mayors, Reeves and CAOs meetings. These meetings continue to be an excellent way for the AMM to feel the pulse of our membership and hear the issues facing our community leaders. I found them really beneficial and look forward to our next meeting – MOS in Brandon. See you there! 

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